

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003327

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, USPACOM FOR FPA HUSO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM TH](#) [HUMAN RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: MAY 1992 DEMOCRACY HEROES TO BE  
REMEMBERED WITH MONUMENT IN BANGKOK

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert J. Clarke, Reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Families of democracy demonstrators killed, injured or missing from a military crackdown in May 1992 laid the foundation stone for a new memorial in Bangkok. Opposition Democrat Party leader Abhisit spoke in praise of those who "sacrificed to bring democracy" to the Thai people. No Royal Thai Government (RTG) officials attended. Victims and their families lamented the fact that the RTG has never taken official responsibility for the deaths and injuries caused by security forces 13 years ago. One pointedly invoked the current violence in the South and the tragedy at Tak Bai as illustrating that the lessons of 1992 have not been fully learned. End Summary.

MONUMENT PLANNED TO HONOR 1992 "MAY HEROES" OF THAI DEMOCRACY

12. (U) On May 17, Poloffs attended a foundation-stone laying ceremony organized by the May 1992 Heroes' Relatives Committee. The simple Brahmin ceremony was officiated by social critic Dr. Prawes Wasi, who is also a member of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC). Also present, in addition to many families who lost relatives in the crackdown, was opposition Democrat Party (DP) leader Abhisit Vejjajiva and DP Bangkok Governor Apirak Kosayodhin. A group of Northeastern farmers from the NGO Assembly of the Poor made up a large part of those gathered. Those farmers had come to Bangkok on May 16 to demonstrate at Government House about rural debt issues. Prominent representatives from the National Human Rights Commission and the NGO Campaign for Popular Democracy also attended.

13. (SBU) Representatives of the RTG or the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party and significant numbers of middle-class Bangkokians, who made up the core of the demonstrators in 1992, were notably not in attendance. Chamlong Srimuang, the former head of the Phalang Dharma Party, an early political mentor (and current advisor) to Thaksin Shinawatra, and a leader of large demonstrations in 1992, also did not attend. He did send a wreath. (Note: PM Thaksin was busy in Buriram province at a "mobile cabinet meeting" which took place at the ancient Khmer temple of Phnom Rung. Deputy Prime Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng, perhaps the most liberal member of Thaksin's cabinet, sent a commemorative wreath. End Note.)

14. (U) DP Leader Abhisit told the crowd that he felt a personal responsibility to those killed in May 1992 as he had made his initial foray into national politics as a Member of Parliament in the first elections held after the May 1992 crackdown. "While we are confident we won't return to a time of military rule again, we must continue the fight for democracy in order to honor those who have suffered so much," he said. Later, Bangkok Governor Apirak pledged full cooperation with the victims' families in completing the monument, which is to be a small park with a conical "stupa" at one end honoring the dead.

FAMILY MEMBERS STILL SEEKING GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

15. (C) Later on May 17, Poloff met with Mr. Adul Keioboriboon and Ms. Jirapha Suebsaihan, members of May 1992 Heroes' Relatives Committee, at the Royal (Ratanakosin) Hotel, located just across the street from the site of the proposed memorial. Adul's son was shot and killed on May 17, 1992, Jirapha's son is still missing and presumed dead. In 1992, the hotel served as a makeshift hospital and sanctuary for some of the demonstrators during the crackdown. Adul stated that officially there are 44 dead and 38 missing from the incident. Eleven persons are permanently disabled and approximately 47 more suffer long-term medical or psychological complications as a result of injuries sustained in the crackdown.

16. (C) According to Adul and Jirapha, families and victims have received some compensation for those who have died, are missing or are injured survivors. He refused to specify the amount received thus far. Adul stated that the money comes through the Social Welfare Department and has been granted in small piecemeal amounts under a "special circumstances" provision in the social welfare system. No separate compensation fund or comprehensive settlement has ever been reached, as the RTG has never officially accepted

responsibility for the deaths and other losses. In July 2003, the Minister of Defense did issue a letter to victims expressing regret, but failed to take responsibility. In December 2003, the cabinet of the Thaksin I administration approved nearly all of the recommendations from an Independent Commission (IC) chaired by former PM Anand Panayarachun that investigated compensation issues for the May 1992 victims. That IC disbanded in January 2003 after recommending that compensation be paid directly to victims and that the RTG build a memorial to them. Adul and Jirapha said that, to date, none of these recommendations have been implemented. The Heroes' Relatives Committee has already commissioned an architectural design for the memorial. Estimated construction costs are 25 million baht (\$640,000). Adul said the Committee could easily raise the funds privately but wants the RTG to take responsibility and recognize not only the mistakes made but also the historic significance that the democracy movement of May 1992 has had on Thai political history.

#### VICTIMS' FAMILIES: RTG RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE IN SOUTH INDICATES LESSONS NOT FULLY LEARNED

17. (C) Adul recounted his sadness upon reading the reports about the RTG's crackdown on demonstrators in October 2004 in Tak Bai, Narathiwat. (78 Muslim demonstrators suffocated to death when they were being transported to a Thai military base, seven others died of gunshot wounds.) He wondered if the Thai military or police would ever learn from their mistakes. Based on the abuses that occurred at Tak Bai, Adul concluded, the military was still using crowd control tactics similar to those that led to the death of his son.

18. (C) Jirapha, a businesswoman from the Northeastern province of Sakon Nakhorn, expressed her sympathy for the family of missing Muslim lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit. (Note: Somchai has been missing since March 2003 and is presumed dead. He disappeared a few months after taking on the case of three Muslim defendants accused of instigating unrest. End note.) She said she had recently visited Somchai's widow, Angkhana, at the Neelapaijit family home in Bangkok. She said that when she went to see Angkhana, she was surprised to see the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) security detail staked out (dual holstered hand guns prominently displayed) on the ground floor of the family home. (Note: This detail was posted after Angkhana reported receiving threats, but now apparently is resented as intrusive. End Note.) Jirapha said that she and Somchai's widow had to go upstairs to Angkhana's bedroom and talk behind closed doors for privacy. Jirapha encouraged Angkhana to come to the May 92 commemoration events but Angkhana declined, saying that she was afraid to go out and furthermore did not like having her DSI detail go with her everywhere. Jirapha said she told Angkhana "Don't let them win, you must go out and speak up for your husband." While recognizing that Angkhana's DSI "bodyguards" have a different duty than the undercover police that Jirapha said followed her for months after her son disappeared, she expressed sympathy with the situation faced by Angkhana and her family, who have become close friends.

19. (C) Both Adul and Jirapha lamented the apparent lack of RTG interest in the commemorative events. They noted that every year since 1992, the Speaker of the House of Representative of the Thai Parliament had attended. This year, Adul noted, the RTG had provided the Committee with some financial assistance to hold the ceremony (in the form of a donation). Adul also complained that the Bangkok middle and upper classes seem to have forgotten the May 1992 events, commenting that "these days the youth seem more interested in cars and cell phones than politics." But he expressed his hope that if the Committee can build the monument by the 15th anniversary commemoration in 2007, public awareness of the events of 1992 will be renewed.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON THE EVENTS OF MAY 17, 1992

10. (U) On May 17, 1992 Thai security forces began operations to break up massive public demonstrations against the government of then-Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon, who had seized power in a military coup which ousted the democratically elected government of former Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhavan in February 1991. For nearly a week prior to the crackdown, large demonstrations demanding the ouster of Suchinda and calling for new democratic elections were led by former head of the Phalang Dharma Party, Chamlong Srimuang. Crowds were estimated at over 100,000 massed in the sweltering heat of mid-May, creating traffic gridlock in the heart of Bangkok's historic capital district. The demonstrations started at the Sanam Luang, or Royal Parade Ground, near the beloved Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha and progressed down Rachadamnern Road to a large traffic circle at Democracy Monument.

11. (U) On the night of May 17, the demonstrations continued to grow. As tensions between police and military units and the demonstrators heightened after several successive nights of protests, the order to arrest Chamlong

and demonstration leaders was given. Clashes erupted between the crowds and security personnel, and government units began to open fire on the demonstrators with automatic weapons, causing scores of deaths and hundreds of injuries. The extent of the casualties from security forces gunfire is still debated. A few days later, King Bhumibol called Chamlong and Suchinda for a public rebuke and an end to the clashes, later appointing Anand Panyarachun as caretaker Prime Minister and setting Thailand on course for a new elected government.

12. (U) During the violence, the former Public Relations Department building was burned to the ground. This is the site where the proposed "Monument to the May 1992 Heroes" is to be built.

COMMENT

13. (C) Comment: The failure of the current government to send a representative to the commemorative events disappointed many observers. The events of May 1992 remain politically sensitive with some factions in the Thai military, particularly the issue of compensation for victims.

Most Thais, however, consider the protests of 13 years ago and the democratic reforms in its wake as a significant turning point in the evolution of Thai democracy. Since that time, the military has "returned to the barracks" and kept out of coup-making. The civilian administration of PM Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai party (and the democratic opposition) in a real sense owe their existence to the sacrifices made in May 1992. The government's decision to ignore the anniversary event will strike many Thais as ironic and callous. End Comment.

ARVIZU